**ASSOCIATED STEREOTYPES**

While others have argued that the teenagers in group homes are “worthless” or “cannot be helped”, there are plenty of success stories involving them; this article will explain a successful case of a young girl from a group home for troubled teenagers. The judgmental views from the public towards teenagers, who are in need of help, causes a social stigma and/or stereotype to be attached with those involved, which doesn’t benefit the teens or the group home workers.

Some researchers have suggested that being labeled with a certain social stigma and/or stereotype will cause the targeted group to believe and live as though that negative aspect truly is a part of them.

In 1902, Charles Horton Cooley’s idea of the Looking-Glass Self2 became evident. It is the sociological concept that suggests that a person’s own concept of ‘self’ comes from society’s interpersonal interactions and perceptions. This means that the way that society sees and reacts to people actually shapes the way all people view themselves. This concept can be simplified into three basic steps: 1. person imagines how society sees him/her, 2. person interprets society’s reaction, and 3. person develops ‘self-concept’.

Another concept that is similar to Cooley’s Looking-Glass Self is Labeling Theory4; which is defined as “the belief that individuals subconsciously notice how others see or label them, and their reactions to those labels, over time, form the basis of their self-identity.”

An example of this is discussed in Dalton Conley’s Sociology Textbook. Victor Rios’s (Assistant Professor, UC Santa Barbara) book, *Punished: Policing the Lines of Black and Latino Boys*, exemplifies this theory:

“Rios examines the way the current aggressive policing strategies have effectively criminalized young boys in poor neighborhoods. Police and parole officers are stationed in schools and community centers, the spaces in which education and mentoring traditionally occur, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy where teens are assumed to be criminals, treated with suspicion bordering on aggression, and watched closely until caught in some criminal act. Is flooding crime-ridden neighborhoods with aggressive policing the right thing to do, sending enforcement to areas where criminal activity is concentrated? Or does sending more police to a neighborhood simply increase the number of people who get caught, closing routes out of that neighborhood by saddling folks with criminal records?”

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His work suggests that the effect of young boys being labeled a deviant/criminal was that they, in return, act like a deviant/criminal.

It’s a process that is interconnected within itself. First, a label is bestowed upon teenagers. For example, an elderly man could see a group of teenagers walking around in his neighborhood and yell to them that they are “bad kids who have no real place in this part of town”. This label causes the next step to occur; which is known as primary deviance. Primary Deviance5 is “the first act of rule-breaking that may incur a label of ‘deviant’ and thus influence how people think about and act toward you”. The teenagers, hearing what the old man thinks of them, subconsciously believe him and therefore “act out”. After all, aren’t they just doing what is expected of them? After primary deviance has occurred, it is almost inevitable that secondary deviance will follow.

Secondary Deviance5 is defined as, “subsequent acts of rule breaking that occur after primary deviance and as a result of your new deviant label and people’s expectations of you”. Those teenagers now frequently break the law by destroying public property and spray painting graffiti all over town. This reoccurring deviant behavior causes teenagers to be stigmatized and the whole process starts over again. That makes you think, doesn’t it? What have you personally done or said that could have caused such behavior?

In the late 1940’s the Solomon Asch Comformity Experiments6 were conducted. The subjects believed to be taking a vision test of determining if lines were the same length or different lengths. The twist in these experiments was that there was only ever one subject in a room at a time (to which was unknown to the subject). The other participants were instructed to purposely give incorrect responses to this test. Asch found that the subject’s would conform to the responses of the people around him/her by giving the wrong responses as well. The results show the power of conformity within groups. The most amazing aspect, about these results, was that the subject’s conformed to the opinions of complete strangers!! It was also tested if a friend of acquaintance of the subject was in the room who offered the correct answer, if only one other person would agree with the subject, and if the subject was permitted to write down his/her responses the subject would answer correctly without conformity.

It is almost impossible to argue that a person can act differently from how others view them as because people are proven to conform to others’ opinions.

So if you label teenagers as “worthless” they are going to eventually view themselves as being worthless. This theory explains why people are hesitant to seeking help and it also gives those facilities that assist those targeted groups to gain a bad reputation. STOP labeling them!!